



In Reply Refer To:

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, Montana 59101
<http://www.blm.gov/mt>



4710 (010.JB)

February 16, 2011

Memorandum

To: James M. Sparks, Field Manager

From: Jared Bybee, Wild Horse and Burro Specialist

Subject: Continued Field Inspection of the PMWHR Escalating Problem

BLM Manual 4720 and I.M. 2009-85 states in part: Escalating problems are defined as conditions that deteriorate over time. The key indicators of escalating problems are a decline in the amount of forage or water available for wild horse or burro use, which results in negative impacts to animal condition and rangeland health. Causal factors are normally drought or animals in excess of AML.

However the current escalating problem is due to a “heavier” than average winter season, limited forage resources in crucial winter range, and wild horses limited to smaller wintering areas than recent past years.

The PMWHR is located in Carbon County, Montana and Big Horn County, Wyoming and consists of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Forest Service and National Park Service. Since the end second half of November 2010 until present, winter conditions have persisted within the Pryor Mountain Wild Horse Range. Unlike typical winter patterns that tend to have periods of snow melting this winter has had very few. Conditions on the wild horse range have remained snow covered even in the lowest elevations.

Periodic monitoring and reports from the public have observed dry crusted snow with an under layer of ice from slight thawing and freezing followed by subsequent snowfalls. Wild horses have been digging through snow to get to forage. Since the previous inspection on February 9, 2011 the weather shifted to a warmer pattern that has allowed for substantial melting of snow. Many areas in the lower reaches of the range on south and west aspects are clear of snow. The hard crust has softened where snow is persisting, with some ice is still present under the snow.

On February 15, 2011 I conducted an inspection of the wild horse range on horseback in order to cover a larger area, visually assess conditions, and locate a greater number of wild horses than previously. The weather was windy and cool, with temperatures in the high forties to low fifties Fahrenheit. Snow was still present at Britton Springs and four wheel drive low range was

needed to access the yard. After unloading my saddle horse I proceeded on horseback out the back of Britton Springs to the south and east. The snow was still 8 inches deep with drifts up to 3 feet deep. The snow was soft with some ice underneath. I proceeded south to look at conditions in the south administrative pasture where the snow cover was similar to Britton Springs. There was no recent horse sign in the area. I then proceeded towards Turkey Flat and from a distance observed one band of four and two bachelors. I proceeded to Turkey Flat and observed the horses at a close distance and all but one appeared to be Henneke class 4 (one mare in class 3). The snow cover on Turkey flat was approximately 50% open with forage easily available and grazing use occurring. I proceeded northeast up lower Sykes Ridge which had considerable melting and clearing on the lower reaches. I rode nearly to Four By Four Cave until encountering 100% snow cover. The area had some wild horse use and two bands were observed about a mile away. I then returned to Turkey Flat.

After returning to Turkey Flat I crossed Big Coulee and proceeded north towards Burnt Timber Ridge around the old uranium mining area. This area forms a “bowl” in between Big Coulee and Burnt Timber Ridge. The entire area appeared relatively free of snow except for drifts and snow cover on the east and north facing aspects. Two bands were intermixed and observed at very close distance. An additional two bands were viewed approximately one half mile away. The wild horses were concentrated in the areas with little snow with a warmer microclimate. They appeared to be in good condition with observed body class conditions of Henneke 4 with one mare 3. They were very curious, alert, and grazing. One of the bands in distance was the band observed on February 9, 2011. The areas the animals are limited to do have some heavy use of the forage.

A total of 6 miles was covered and nearly thirty wild horses were observed. The entire situation still cannot be 100 percent determined from observation of these horses. Most of the wild horses observed appeared to be wintering fairly well. A colder weather pattern is forecast for the next 5 days, but the forecast does not predict below zero temperatures. Until additional areas are free of snow and more forage is available there is still an escalating problem, but no emergency.

Jared Bybee

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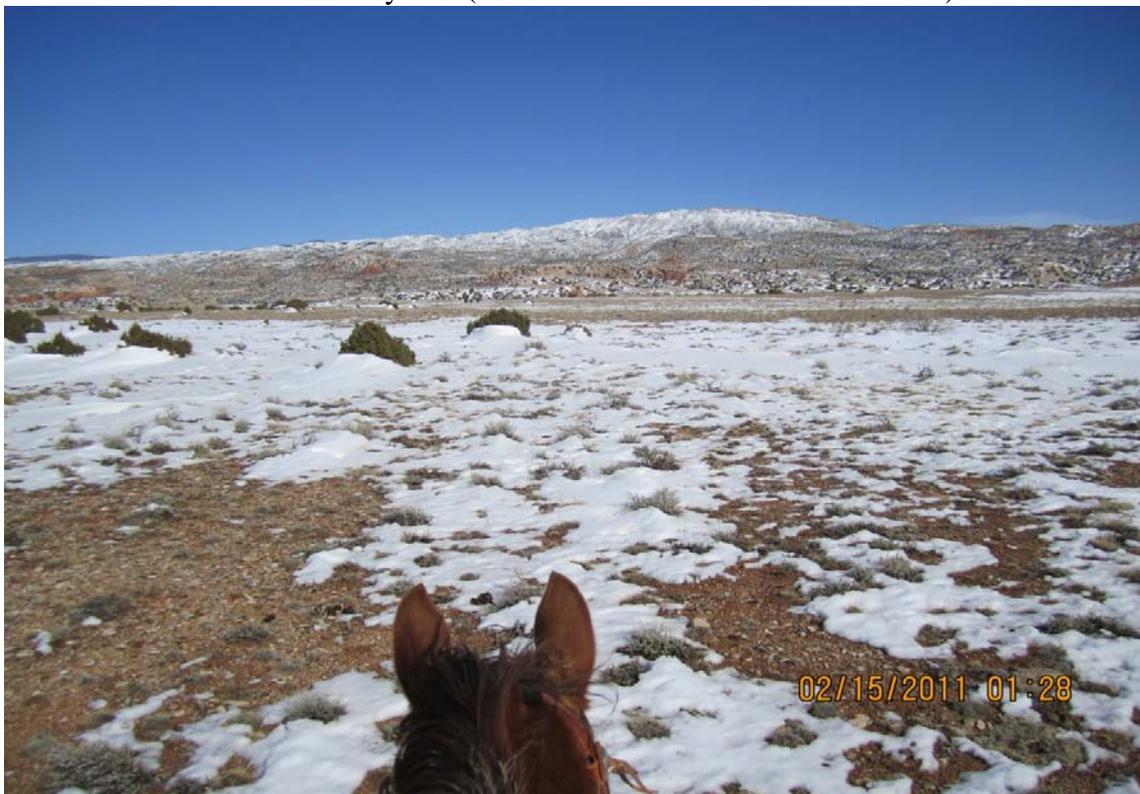
Attachments:

1. Photos

Looking to the South Administrative Pasture



View to the North from Turkey Flat (Band of Wild Horses in the Distance)



Two Bands of Curious Wild Horses Mixed Together Maintaining their Body Condition



Use of Forage North of Turkey Flat

